

Emergency Responder

WASHINGTON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIVISION



WASHINGTON MILITARY DEPARTMENT

September - October 2004

Mount St. Helens volcano reawakens after 18 years

After 18 years of relative slumber, Mount St. Helens rumbled to life Sept. 23 with a series of small earthquakes, challenging local, state and federal agencies to operate together to direct emergency response actions for the volcano.

Shallow earthquakes occurring at a rate of four per minute beneath the volcano led the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to issue a St. Helens Volcano Advisory — the second of three alert levels— on Sept. 29. The heightened alert prompted a Phase II Enhanced Operations level in the state emergency operations center.

When a small volcano eruption sent steam and ash as high as 9,700 feet above the volcano on Oct. 1, downwind ash fall advisories were issued for Skamania and Cowlitz counties. A light dusting of ash was reported in the Randle and Packwood areas of eastern Lewis County.

In response to the ash and steam eruption, the State Emergency Operations Center briefly advanced to a Phase III full activation and emergency operations centers activated in Clark and Skamania counties.

Meanwhile, representatives of local, federal and state agencies convened Oct. 1 in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest headquarters office in Vancouver to begin to assemble a unified command to direct volcano emergency response actions.

One of the major challenges was the growing horde of local, regional and national media attracted to the reawakening of the Mount. St. Helens volcano. The media interest

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Umatilla Chemical Depot workers load a pallet of M-55 rockets containing GB Sarin nerve agent into a special transport vehicle Sept. 7 to begin the process to destroy and incinerate the depot's chemical munitions. The transport vehicle moved the rockets from storage igloos to the depot's incineration facility where the rockets and nerve agent were later destroyed. (UMCD Photo)

Umatilla Depot begins destruction of chemical weapons

After years of preparation, the U.S. Army has begun the long-awaited destruction of chemical agent and munitions stored at the Umatilla Chemical Depot.

On Sept. 7, a M55 rocket that contained GB-sarin became the first weapon to be destroyed at the depot. The rocket was one of 15 in a pallet that was moved by special vehicle from a weapons storage igloo to the disposal facility where the rocket was punched, drained and sheared into pieces. Sheared rocket pieces were then destroyed in the disposal facility's four furnaces.

Destruction of the first rocket in the disposal facility represented "a significant milestone in the depot's history," said Umatilla Chemical Depot Commander Lt. Col. Doc Holliday.

The depot by late October had drained and destroyed 660 rockets, each containing a gallon of chemical agent.

On Oct. 18, the depot announced the first use of its liquid incinerators to destroy nearly 560 gallons of sarin chemical agent. The 11-hour liquid incineration process needed at least 500 gallons of agent to begin operation.

Doug Hamrick, Umatilla Chemical Depot Facility project general manager, said the destruction of chemical agent in a depot incinerator was another milestone for the facility.

"It represents the final destruction step of the agent from the rockets previously destroyed in the Deactivation Furnace and the complete elimination of the risk associated with the individual munitions. There is nothing left to

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More than 70 staff and managers from the Governor's Executive Cabinet agencies attended an emergency management briefing and bioterrorism tabletop exercise Sept. 27 in the State Emergency Operation Center at Camp Murray. The exercise, which was led by Tom Fitzsimmons, chief of staff for Gov. Gary Locke, highlighted actions that state agencies must coordinate during emergencies and identified issues that will require further work among the agencies. (EMD Photo by Mark Ligman)

Umatilla Depot begins destruction of chemical weapons

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harm the public or impact the environment," Hamrick said.

The depot planned to continue its slow and deliberate 90-day start up through the fall.

Meanwhile, the Oregon Court of Appeals in late September rejected a legal challenge that would have immediately halted the destruction of the depot's chemical munitions.

The three-judge panel concluded there was no evidence that emissions from the depot would harm pregnant women, breast-feeding infants and children as opponents of the incineration had contended.

The anti-incineration group GASP had sought an injunction to halt the depot's incineration work and to replace it with an alternative of chemical neutralization, which the group claimed was a newer, safer technology for the destruction of chemical weapons. Appeals court judges denied the injunction request and stated that they expected the GASP lawsuit to eventually fail.

E911 Committee members are honored by APCO

Two members of the State E911 Advisory Committee received 2004 awards from the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO).

Chris Fischer, of the Valley Communications Center in Kent, was selected as APCO's Communications Center Director of the Year. She has served as state advisory committee chair since 2000 and also heads the advisory committee's telecommunications training work group.

Peggy Fouts, E911 Manager, Grays Harbor County, was presented the 2004 Maurice Courtright Award for her contributions to APCO's Washington chapter "through personality, persuasion, caring, and efforts of helping others outside of the normal work assignments." Fouts chairs the State E911 Advisory Committee's Public Education work group and the Fiscal Year 2006 Contract Policy Review Committee.

Preparedness month observed in September

Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD) prepared and distributed a new terrorism preparedness brochure as part of the September campaign to tell state residents about how to prepare to be safe from natural and man-made hazards.

In a proclamation, Gov. Gary Locke also made the following preparedness recommendations:

- Residents should prepare themselves to be self-sufficient for at least three days following an act of terrorism, or natural or man-made disaster.
- State agencies and state employees should prepare so they can continue to provide essential public services after a disaster and support the state's disaster response and recovery mission.
- The use of information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric weather radios can reduce the loss of life and property from all hazards, including terrorism.

Consumer incentive information about NOAA weather radios can be found at the Washington Emergency Management Division website at <emd.wa.gov>.

For further information emergency preparedness information, contact Barbara Everette Thurman, EMD public education manager, at (253) 512-7047.

Clallam County holds six tsunamis workshops

The tsunamis threat to the North Olympic Peninsula was the focus of six workshops held in early September in Clallam County.

Tsunamis pose a particular threat to the county because of the Cascadia subduction earthquake zone that lies off the Washington and Oregon coastline.

The workshops discussed the areas at risk for tsunami damage and provided material about how to prepare for earthquake and tsunami events.

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“The incident is the media,” said Tom Knappenberger, Gifford Pinchot National Forest public affairs officer in a Portland Oregonian story. “To my knowledge there’s never been a bigger media concentration for a natural resources issue in the Northwest—at least not since the May 18, 1980, eruption.”

Chuck Hagerhjelm, an EMD liaison to the Vancouver unified command, said emergency managers came to recognize that an event like Mount St. Helens can be much more of a media show than an actual emergency. He said agencies then needed to recognize that a single source of media information—or joint information center (JIC)—was a necessity.

In addition, JIC staff members had to be donated by host agencies since there was no presidential disaster declaration, state proclamation of emergency, or authorization for state fire services or law enforcement resources mobilization. Roger Hieb, another EMD liaison to the unified command, said the event pointed out the need for a more systematic way to staff the the joint information center.

The JIC officially opened on the morning of Oct. 4. It featured two daily media briefings and a phone team that answered media and public calls from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. each day under the direction of Deborah Needham of the Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency (CRESA).

JIC staff included representatives from the U.S. Forest Service; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; U.S.



A plume of steam and ash vents from a new protrusion of lava on the floor of Mount St. Helens' volcanic crater in early October. After an 18-year interlude, the volcano came to life again Sept. 23. The eruption activity led to the formation of a unified emergency command to handle media and volcano emergency response actions. (USGS Photo)

Coast Guard; Federal Emergency Management Agency; Washington state departments of Military, Revenue, Ecology and Information Services; Oregon Department of Geology; U.S. Geological Survey (USGS); and Clark and Pierce counties.

Even when the volcano advisory level was lowered to Level 2 on Oct. 6, sunny fall weather and dramatic scenes of volcanic activity made the St. Helens eruption a story of world-wide interest.

At the JIC, the phone team handled as many as 200 media calls daily in its 11 days of operation. To staff the team, Needham used a regional public information group to recruit about 41 call takers from 30 different agencies in the Portland-Vancouver area. She said upwards of another 30 persons worked in the JIC's information/production section.

Daily briefings were held at the Vancouver JIC and at the Coldwater Lookout Observatory near the volcano. Each briefing featured USGS geologists, who on three occasions were asked to provide live broadcast comments about ongoing eruption activity.

Media briefings also provided opportunities to give area residents

and the media health and safety messages from health and law enforcement agencies.

Despite the initial challenges, the JIC operation worked extremely well, said Diane Offord, who served as the state lead in the operations center. “It was truly an interagency approach to managing the public information function.”

As in the case of the JIC, participating agencies were slow to agree on the use of incident command system to establish a unified command of local, state and federal agencies for the emergency, said Hieb.

The introduction of an inter-agency incident under the command by David Johnson of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest was an important step to provide continuity for the unified command operation, Hieb added.

Working under the unified command process, local and federal authorities were able to coordinate response plans and to hammer out a new closure plan for roads and trails near the volcano.

Hagerhjelm said federal, state and local volcano response planners now need to take the plans devel-

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EMD staff assignments, promotions and appointments

Jerald Compton was named the permanent administrative assistant in the Emergency Management Division's (EMD) Director's Office Sept. 8. Compton, who came to EMD in 2001, had been the secretary administrative in the Mitigation, Analysis and Plans Unit.

Mario Badua joined EMD on Sept. 7 as the telecommunications coordinator in the Telecommunications Section of the Response and Recovery Unit. He previously worked with the state Department of Transportation Traffic Management Center in Parkland as a traffic systems operations specialist.

Evelyn Peters, who has worked as program assistant in the Emergency Management Division's Recovery Field Office since 2001, was selected as homeland security/logistics program assistant effective Sept. 27 in the Analysis and Plans Section of the Mitigation, Analysis and Plans Unit.

Paul McNeil was named the permanent emergency operations section supervisor on Oct. 6. He was appointed assistant emergency operations section supervisor last December and had served as interim section supervisor following last April's departure of former section supervisor Ken Parrish.

Ray Cross was selected on Oct. 7 as EMD's new Terrorism Exercise and Training Program Coordinator. Cross, who joined the division in 2002, previously served as training and exercise coordinator in the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program.

Sandy Bigelow promoted to the position of secretary administrative in the Mitigation, Analysis and Planning Unit effective Nov. 1. A four-year EMD employee, Bigelow had been a secretary senior in Homeland Security Section of the Preparedness Unit.

In Memoriam

Fran Cunningham, who had retired July 31 after working eight years as project employee in the Emergency Management Division's Recovery section, died of cancer on Sept. 23. She had been a supervisor of public assistance project contracts in eight federal disasters.

Jimmie Hocott, who retired in 2001 after working 22 years with EMD, died Sept. 15 after a four-year battle with cancer. He had served as state communications and warning officer and telecommunications section supervisor.

EMD programs receive two national awards

Two Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD) programs won awards Sept. 30 at the National Earthquake Conference in St. Louis, Mo. The conference presented Awards of Excellence to the following EMD programs:

- The All Hazard Alert Broadcasting (AHAB) Radio system for response. The program provides both tone and voice alert notification for natural, man-made or weapons of mass destruction events. The devices are being installed in high-risk facilities, high traffic public and private venues, and areas without power such as shorelines and beaches. The first wind-powered unit was installed at Ocean Shores in 2003.
- EMD's Earthquake Outreach Program. To help Washington school children understand tsunami warnings and to prepare for a tsunami. The division developed "How the Smart Family Survived a Tsunami" booklet and school education program for coastal areas. The booklet has been digitized and given to five Pacific Rim countries for their tsunami outreach programs.

APCO honors Everett School District for 9-1-1 leadership

Everett Public Schools received the 2004 Corporate Award for Leadership in 9-1-1 Location Solutions at the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) conference in August. The award cited the notification system that has been installed for 9-1-1 calls placed within the Everett schools network. The system alerts the school from which the call has been placed and gives the caller location for the local Public Safety Answering Point.

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oped from the St. Helens response and use them to refine volcano plans for Mount Rainier and Mount Baker/Glacier Peak.

St. Helens seismic activity continued at a low level into late October as part of the building of a new lava dome inside the volcano's crater. USGS maintained the threat Level 2 Volcano Advisory because the intensity of the volcanic activity could change with little warning.

The State EOC also remained at a Phase II activation for the volcano. On Oct. 15, the unified command transitioned to a Type III team directed by the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and the joint information center closed. Media calls for volcano activity were referred to the USGS, and national forest road information was directed to the Gifford Pinchot National Forest offices.



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The Washington Emergency Management Division, including the State Emergency Operations Center, is located in Building 20 on Camp Murray, located at exit 122 on Interstate 5 south of Tacoma, Washington.